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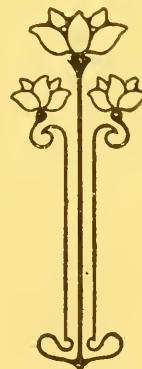




ABRAHAM LINCOLN

AN ADDRESS DELIVERED BEFORE THE LINCOLN
CLUB AT KALAMAZOO, MICHIGAN,
FEBRUARY 9, 1907

By E. M. IRISH



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ABRAHAM LINCOLN.

On February 9th, 1907, the Lincoln Club of Kalamazoo County, held its annual banquet at the Auditorium in the City of Kalamazoo. Hon. James R. Garfield was the guest of the evening, and spoke on "The Federal Regulation of Commerce."

The following is the address of E. M. Irish in response to the toast, "Abraham Lincoln:"

Mr. Toastmaster and Gentlemen:

The committee of the club have asked me to talk about President Lincoln.

It cannot be fitting for me to relate the facts of his life, because for years—even the crickets under the hearth-stones have sung them to the American people.

There is always a consolation prize for the fellow who is drawn for an after dinner talk. He may, if he pleases, be rambling in his remarks. The audience are generally surprised if he is not; and he need not be logical. The audience are always surprised—and often pained—if he tries to be.

I will promise not to spring logical surprises on you to-night. I will only try to play cricket a little.

What is the reason for this fireside friendship with a president? Why do the people love to talk about Lincoln? Why has the committee asked me to speak of him to-night? For I cannot say anything that will be new to you.

Perhaps I cannot do better than to relate an incident, and explain its meaning as well as I can.

A few years ago an exposition was held in a neighboring state. In one of the art rooms was a statue of Apollo,—the Greek God,—as Thackeray wrote upon a time,—“One of the Immortal Gods who are now dead.”

It was carved in the idol stone of Italy,—a marvel of manhood,—a glory of physical beauty. There it poised with lyre in hand and a chiseled song on the marble lips.

One of the manifold myths of the ancients stood revealed. It was Apollo with his harp singing the world old song,—the music that raised Troy from Mount Ida’s hazy slope.

In the alcove’s softened light its beauty hushed the louder hum of voices, and groups of men and women were stayed in passing, compelled by a master’s charm.

Near it was another statue moulded in bronze. The figure was tall and ungainly. The drapery was not—Grecian. It was a Prince Albert coat that seemed to hang in lanky folds, and to need pressing. The face of the bronze was plain and sad.

No thought of art or beauty rippled on the lingerer’s lips,—but gay faces grew serious, and some of them tearful. Then one would murmur to another, “It is Lincoln,”—and the hush on the gazers was like a spell.

Suppose a stranger from a far country to whom our history and the mythology of the ancients were unknown—an exile from some distant star—had wandered through the gallery. Perhaps with the artist longing in his heart he might have looked at the two figures and the groups around them.

Suppose he asked one of us, Who are those men,

and why the contrast in the way they touch your people? One is beautiful. The other is awkward and looks out of place so near it. When did they live, and what did they do?

What could we tell him?

Sir: One of them never lived except in fable,—except as the artist's dream of beauty lives always.

Phidias and Praxiteles and the sculptors who came after them never saw him. They have seen his prisoned apparition peering out from the unhewn stone. It haunted them, and often they tried with their cunning to set the white eidolon free. But they could never quite do it. The man you see there never lived in middle earth—never on its land or sea. It is only an effort to catch an ideal—a dream of the sensuous beauty of our race.

With his harp he is building a city to the music of the immortals. That was the way they put up buildings in the olden days. Now it is one of the lost arts—so we call it a legend. We use a steam hoist now. Apollo runs the engine and whistles them up.

Ah, but the stranger might say, If this race of yours has such classic ideals of strength and beauty, why do all the groups pause with reverence before the other figure; why the trace of sadness on the homely face, and why the hushed and tearful homage that is paid it?

Sir: Because this one lived and walked our earth and knew its people. Because when they see him in bronze or homespun they think of a great, kindly, noble heart, that the gift of power could never spoil. Over that image the

memory of a republic broods, and the spirit beauty of its meaning creeps into the looker's soul.

The stranger might say, Tell me about this man of your planet?

Well, we will try to.

We could tell him he was born in an old Kentucky home—in a log cabin. It was on the twelfth day of February, 1809. Two days later and he would have been a valentine. It was in our dim barbaric days—called in story the nineteenth century.

He had a noble pioneer woman for a mother. Her name before she was married was Nancy Hanks. On that February day in the morning of eighteen hundred, in that little cabin, the first Lincoln club was formed.

It is the Prima Donna by the cradle side who sings the grand songs of the ages, and they build men.

The boy did not have the culture and training of the schools. Sometimes an itinerant teacher happened along. He “boarded round”—“spherical board”—it has been called—and taught what little he knew himself.

In one way however, frontier education was a success. It was possible to study the spelling book. Spelling bees were among the swell functions of the backwoods four hundred, and the boys used to bet that Abe Lincoln could spell down all comers. Don't take this as a tip, sir; because it would not be safe to bet that way on every president of the United States.

Among Lincoln's early books were the Bible and Pilgrim's Progress, the life of George Washington, and the poems of Robert Burns.

From this kind of reading he grew up with the habit of using language in a simple, direct way. Even when it was put into a political speech people knew what it meant.

Afterwards he studied law. At first it troubled him to understand it. I don't wonder at that; for I have just been reading the amendments to the Interstate commerce acts, and the railroad rate bill.

Then he concluded it was of no use to try to be a lawyer unless he studied geometry. He borrowed a geometry and tackled it out under the trees. Its clear and absolute reasoning attracted him. It always came out at the truth. One of the things he found set down there, was that a straight line is the shortest distance between two points.

Later in life he tried for weary months to convince certain generals that it applied to the distance between a point called Washington, and one known as Richmond.

Still another axiom must have made an impression on his mind, judging by the way he stuck to it for four years. It was that the whole is greater than any of its parts.

Finally he became a country lawyer. A country lawyer is sometimes like Kipling's British soldier, his "Tommy Atkins." Kipling tells us that "Single men in barracks don't grow into plaster saints."

Stephen A. Douglas, who grew up with Lincoln, once said of him in a speech:

"He was then as good at telling an anecdote as now. He could beat any of the boys at wrestling or running a foot race, in pitching quoits or tossing a copper; could ruin more liquor than all of the boys of the town together; and the dignity and impartiality with which he presided at a horse race or fist fight, excited the admiration and won the praise of everybody."

From what I have heard the old folks say in Southern Illinois, I conclude that Douglas knew what he was talking about.

It is not worth while for us to try to make saints of George Washington and Abraham Lincoln. Those who were near to them have told us so.

I am glad Lincoln had some faults. It brings him nearer to the rest of us. He could understand men better.

Goethe said that it was only by acting foolishly that he learned to talk wisely.

I do not want any friends without faults myself; for if I found one who was perfect, how quickly he would find me out, and it would be a case of friendship ceasing.

The youngster himself seemed to have a prophetic forecast that he might improve later on—for in boyhood days he wrote in his copy book these lines:

“Abraham Lincoln,
His hand and pen,
He will be good,
But God knows when.”

As he grew into public life he became an orator,—and at the same time a man who saw the truth clearly, and had the independence of character to speak out his convictions. He took pains to understand thoroughly what he was to talk about. He was gifted with common sense,—and his clearness of statement carried meanings with certainty.

Orators are so plentiful now that they will sometimes pay to get into banquets and hear themselves talk. Many of them are dangerous if allowed to run at large. They acquire facility of expression. They read the newspapers

and encyclopedias,—and the magazines, a little more than the rest of us. With a watered capital of superficial knowledge they set up wisdom factories. They gain notoriety and become agitators instead of safe leaders. Some of them make us think of what a certain Englishman said of Lord Macaulay. He said he wished he could be as sure of anything as Macaulay was of everything.

Socrates said all men were sufficiently eloquent in what they understood. Another writer tells us that “Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.”

The talker whose mind is ripe on a subject; who is sincere and sees with impartial eyes; who tries to be fair; can use the gift of language so people will not only listen with understanding hearts, but with believing minds. He will speak words that are alive. As some one said, “Cut them and they will bleed.”

Lincoln could do all that. He was all that.

To-day his speeches are considered by good critics to be models of sterling English. But at the time they were given to the public,—even his first inaugural is an illustration,—the small grammarians took offense. They were of the lawnmower type. They would run their rattle-trap reapers over a green sward, until it could not billow with the breeze and show the change of sunlight and shadow to the passing cloud.

Those people are supposed to be dead now—like Thackeray’s gods. They were akin to the traveler who went to Switzerland and saw the Alps. When asked how he liked them, he said, “It is a likely country, but it needs grading badly.”

Once Lincoln was a soldier. When the Black Hawk war broke out he became captain of a volunteer company of backwoodsmen. Splendid American soldiers they make, because they can shoot rifles so the bullets hit the mark.

But the war was over too soon for him to get into a fight. He went back to civil life a reformed tin patriot,—like many a veteran who saved his country from invasion in the Spanish-American war.

When he was captain of that company of volunteers, no astrologer of the midnight read the magnet star of his fate. No one told us where it would draw him:—that he was to become the great captain of the greatest volunteer army the world ever saw:—that as the embers of its campfires grew cold and it marched over the goal of victory, a stray shot across the falling curtain would lay him low on the field of honor,—dead with the white stars of the republic draped across his silent heart,—and no stain upon them except the ruddy drops of patriot blood.

Around his rude cradle the wolfkins of the wilderness howled. When he lay down for his long rest it was in the nation's capital; and over his last cradle,—the one that never rocks,—the people and their statesmen—the soldiers and the field marshals of his native land,—and even a brave and generous enemy—wept.

But how did this happen?

He was born of the race of the Anglo-Saxons; and stranger, I must tell you they are a scrappy folk. When no outsider is pitching on to them, they will fight with each other. They do not have as many revolutions as the South American states,—but they take themselves very seriously;

—they have bigger ones, and keep them up longer. When we have a family row, many crowns must crack, my Lord.

We speak of Lincoln and say it is after the war? After what war? Every year the soldiers of the north,—and of the south,—drop the white and crimson bloom of springtime on their comrades' graves. They may consecrate those mounds with red roses or white ones, and no partisan fervor makes the color significant.

But turn back in our story to the Isle of Britain. There you may read that the red rose of Lancaster and the white one of York, were emblems on different sides of civil wars more fierce and bitter than our own.

The cavaliers of the Stuart and the Ironsides of Cromwell! Scotland's mountain and lowland! Culloden's dreary heath where the tartan plaids were rolled in blood! The Tower of London and the scaffold! The Colonial Revolution! And of course when "nothing else was doing" in the free for all,—the flag of green Erin flapping over an Irish rebellion!

These allusions recall periods when this tribe we belong to flashed their swords or their shillalahs in each other's faces, and Merry England's hearts were split with English steel.

They were a Christian people. For many years they were so anxious to save each other's souls that they fought civil wars over the proper way to do it. But when they killed a fellow on the other side they knew that his soul was lost.

Much of the modern trouble has been over taxes. The Anglo-Saxon is an ardent patriot. He loves his

country and thinks it the best the sun ever shone on—provided of course his party is running the machine. On general principles he is always ready to die for it. But let the tax gatherer call and he is likely to do two things. In the first place he will be like a man who went to sleep in church. One of the deacons was passing the hat and nudged him with it. The man woke up, looked at the hat, and said, "No, tain't mine." Then he looked the other way. The deacon was lucky to get his hat back. If the tax officers keep on nudging—our patriots are likely to bristle up, and again they are ready—to die for their country.

If King George had not waked up the colonies with his taxation cudgel, Michigan might be in England to-day.

In Kalamazoo, when we doubt whether the warlike spirit of the continental lives, we ask the citizens to pay a paving tax.

When the orators stirred the question of property rights in African slaves, the electrodes of revolution became charged. Part of our people believed in the extension of slavery, and part did not. Some would let it stay as it was, and others wanted to wipe it out altogether.

And stranger, the speakers on both sides kept saying things, until the radical wings of the different parties were live-wired with the same electric load that bristles the hair on a couple of bull dogs when the orators around them say, "Sic 'em, Tige!"

The man in bronze said that a house divided against itself could not stand; that our union could not exist half slave and half free.

He was elected president. When he took his seat seven states had seceded. He did not want war. In his first inaugural he pleaded with an earnest and reasoning tenderness against it. But he was talking to Anglo-Saxons after the orators had slapped up their fighting blood. The scrap was on. The man in bronze didn't like it. His kindly heart could not look unmoved at bloodshed among his countrymen. But he stood bravely up beside the quivering liberty mast, where the old flag of Yorktown and Lundy's Lane was floating from the halyards. Then he was jeered at by his enemies and called a baboon, because he was not a handsome man. Often he lacked the support of men he had counted with him. Some of the people wanted to go faster than he did, and others did not want to go at all. He was fixed much as a teamster was who bought a pair of horses, and found that one of them was a puller from "Cluck," and the other was balky. Someone asked him if his new team agreed. He said, "You bet they do. One of them is willing to do all the work, and the other is willing he should."

Part of the north wanted emancipation at once, and part did not want it at all. And he had the loyal slave states of the border to satisfy. If these states that stayed in the union had thrown their war dice with the south, a successful confederacy might have been the outcome;—and after that,—old-fashioned Scotch and English war on the boundary.

The union men who lived in these states had trouble in keeping them loyal. They needed protection from the radical wing of the northern abolitionists. In Lincoln they

found not only a statesman, but one of the most subtle politicians of his day.

The man raised on the border knew where the balance of power lay. He tried to bring both sides to compensated emancipation. If the states along the Dixie line had accepted his plan, it is probable that it could have been carried out.

There were times when he was anything but the idol of the country. His soldiers died in fever swamps and fell before the rifle sleet. His generals were defeated. Some scamps at the north made the army blankets and soldiers' overcoats of shoddy. The war taxes ran high. He was abused by many of the men who elected him. Slander is like death:—it loves a shining mark.

The shadow of domestic sorrow gathered over his household. Amid the cares that perplexed him, he lost the son who was the comfort of his heart. The pathos of the look you notice grew deeper in his eyes, and at times seemed sad as Gethsemane. But he grew up with the army and it loved him. Through all his troubles he had a patience that never turned away from the troubles of his people. He managed to drive the team with the balky horse. He became an evolution of the civil war.

By and by, the people began to realize that he had been honest and sincere and fair to all; that he had been unselfish, and the real friend of his country. He had never used his great power to uplift himself. He had been handling the Anglo Saxons in a civil scrap; and no man in their history had ever done so well with so large a contract. They believed he always told them the truth,

and they gave him a place in their hearts with two of their other leaders who were truth tellers:—King Alfred and George Washington.

But as the chaff is fanned away by the winnowing winds of history he seems nearer than the others, and we begin to know him for the commoner of the centuries.

When he left us the war was just over. North and south were bitter toward each other, and we did not have a united country at the farewell to the dead chieftain.

It was sixteen years later when the English speaking—fraternities, had the first real family reunion in their history. Then we gathered around the open mound of the soldier who sleeps in beautiful Lake View by the Ohio shores of Erie.

He also was our president, and fell at his post of duty. All the many warring elements of the past—all who spoke the mother tongue—went with him hand in hand, down to the marge of the mystic river.

North and south together! England! Ireland! Scotland! What buried memories of old wars! Great Britain and the states!

When the cable sped the tidings of his passing—within a few brief hours on roofs where the “Banner of England blew,” and over the republic’s untroubled sections, the two flags once hostile trailed at half mast together. Across the tides old bells that rang in Hampden’s time, in the stormy morning of liberty rocked slowly in their towers. As their solemn music stirred the patriot dust of the English centuries,—we might almost have heard it,—blending with the tolling of our own;—chiming

like the sweet and homelike bells of Shandon,—two kindred nations' peace and sympathy.

Of the long line of leaders gone before,—to him it was given to bring all the Anglo-Saxon's in peaceful union around his resting place.

How eloquently could those impassioned lips, grown silent under the seal that speech has never broken, have spoken of such occasion if another had been in his place!

Our thought goes backward to the past and returns to this room again, and our eyes grow misty as we welcome the guest of the evening. For to him—even part of his country's history is a memory of his youth wherein the stranger may not mingle.

Lincoln said the two battles of the Anglo-Saxon civil wars that meant most to the people, were Marston Moor where Cromwell crushed the Stuarts, and Gettysburg.

The slaughter at Gettysburg hurt the president deeply. It was on this field that he made the short but never to be forgotten speech that has been classed with the oration of Pericles over the Grecian dead.

Before the battle was fought a change had come over the armies. When the first call for volunteers was made, light hearted boys flocked gaily to the camps for what they thought would be a ninety day picnic.

This race of ours loves an army,—till it comes to footing the bills. The lust of martial glory has been the passion of its generations. It has too often passed for the noble sentiment of patriotism. An English Colonel said a few years ago, that fighting a human enemy was better sport than elephant shooting or potting tigers. He called

it man hunting. Lincoln was not that kind of sportsman. No true patriot is.

But when the flag slid down the staff at Sumter, the land was wild with rolling drums and the lit of bugles. The fledgling soldiers heard the mellow trumpets play the camp calls,—the drill,—the jolly jingle of the reveille;—which the boys will tell you kept saying, “I can’t get ‘em up in the morning.” They heard the mess call; and they took to it the way chickens do to the ruck-tuck of the dough spoon on the feed pan:—for the poor fellows thought it would always mean three square meals a day. They learned the long roll. But they had never heard the mournful melody of the field horns sounding taps over a soldier’s grave. They knew not the guard line, nor the solitary post of the midnight sentinel. They had never helped to kill their fellow men by thousands; nor had they seen their bleeding comrades die.

By and by the marches and the many battles came; and the northern and southern regiments had grown into veteran soldiers and efficient armies.

On both sides of the Blue Ridge they were marching to what I suppose the sporting Colonel would call a summer shooting meet. The prizes they were to shoot for were new target ranges on the soil of the north. They came in touch at Gettysburg.

In those battalions the flower of the republic’s youthful manhood trooped. They were no longer picnic soldiers. They were seasoned by camp and march;—reckless survivors of battle death rolls; and hardened to military murder:—the two finest armies in the world.

Over them the mountains' wild-winged eagles reeled,
as if they already scented the noble carrion of onset.

The massing columns that flew the colors of Lee,
deployed into the long battle fronts; and the heart-wave of
the Southland swelled against the lines of Meade.

Once more the mad-lipped pipers blew; and the
doomful horns of Hades were winding out the order,
“Commence firing.”

From skyey deeps above the cannon smoke, the
bugler of the innumerable legions blew the call, “Lie
down;” and from the two armies, thousands of Ameri-
can soldiers heard,—and were still on their last field.

Many of them were boys from eighteen to twenty
years old. As Pericles said,—“Youth perished from the
land like spring from the year.”

It was the wickedest scrap in Anglo-Saxon history.
It was late enough in the story of the English lands for us
to have known better. Somebody had made a terrible
mistake.

There they sleep; and so sleep the soldiers and sailors
who went down in the other battles of our civil war—and
in the battles of our other civil wars.

O spellful wonder of heraldry—the wind blown flag of
the legion—the glimpse of cross or color that made bright
the dying eyes of patriot and crusader! When its folds
shine across the rolling smoke and lure the long lines
onward through the volleys; surely it is the beautiful
guidon of the Angel of Death that blinds humanity to the
crime of Cain.

It was not strange that the great kindly heart of the

president fell sad and grieving for his country and its lost: —not strange that the tragedy sank into his soul; nor that a message grew there in all sincerity that stands with the mighty words of history.

Pericles, the soldier, statesman, patriot, orator of the Grecian land, had a long homely head. The crowds used to jeer him and call him "Squill head," "Onion head." The generations have always mocked their Saviours.

But what the Grecian orator said in that beautiful garden of Athens, away in the Mayday of popular government, may well be applied to Lincoln.

"Of illustrious men," said Pericles, "the whole world is the grave, and not only does the inscription upon columns in their native land point it out; but in countries which are not their own, there dwells with everyone an unwritten memorial of the heart, rather than that of a material monument."

The world needs no Old Mortality chipping out the renaissance of memory on marbles gray with the ages' moss, to remind it of Pericles and of Lincoln. And one of them spoke twenty-three centuries ago.

The Grecian's thought still lives. The language it was moulded in is a silent tongue.

When the grammar that Lincoln studied by the pine knot's fitful flicker is dead to all but the student of antiquity, the cheerful lamp of his steadfast soul will light the onward glooms.

His brain was strong and sagacious. The heart that bent its purpose was sincere,—and as near as may be in mortal harness,—it was unselfish.

Loyalty to duty and his fellowman it was not in his nature to shirk.

But, says the stranger, Was the sad face always sad?

O, no. The man in bronze could have been represented as telling a funny story; and then he would have looked pleasant enough to have his picture taken. Only that is not the way we like best to remember him.

He was the yarn spinner of his generation. His stories were like the arrows of Robin Hood,—feathered to sureness with the gray goose wing. They sped to the mark and cleft the peeled white of the willow wand. He could wrap the whole meaning of a campaign in one little story and hand out the package to the audience.

He told them at cabinet meetings. Grave secretaries like Mr. Chase and Mr. Stanton, had their dignity, and it is said their modesty also, shocked by his levity.

If a story illustrated his point he shot it at them, even if it was a wanton-wise one. He had grown up in the pioneer west. He read Burns in his boyhood.

The same pen that wrote "The Cotter's Saturday Night," and "Bonny Doon," and "Highland Mary,"—also wrote some of the most ribald rhymes in the language. But at the time they were written they meant more than vulgarity. They punctured the inflated tires of hypocrisy. Robert Burns was a man for all that.

The same voice that told the cabinet stories, was also the voice of a poet:—one who loved his fellow men. When the tides of insurrection were brimming round him, he said to the south.

"We are not enemies but friends. We must not be enemies.

Though passion may have strained, it must not break our bonds of affection. The mystic chords of memory stretching from every battle-field and patriot grave to every living heart and hearthstone all over this broad land, will yet swell the chorus of the union when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature."

This is one of the best short poems in the language.

The civil war is over; but the Anglo-Saxons are not at rest. If Lincoln were alive to-day we could hear his counseling voice talking in the same strain to capital and labor,—telling them one could not live without the other; and that they must be friends and not enemies.

He had faith in the people, and so may we. The outlook is often troublesome, but when they understand,—and they always do understand in the end,—the people are right. And stranger, to-day we have the safest government the world ever knew.

Well, the man from the other planet might say: You have not made me understand the parable very well. But I gather from it that this race of yours is superstitious and deplores death as a calamity. Do you know it is the best of living:—the gentlest and most kindly of the material offices of nature? Though your lives are like nights of trouble Death is the portal of the morning.

And yet you touch for me those "Mystic chords of memory," that wind through all the worlds of space.

Your Wordsworth wrote:

"The soul that riseth with us,
Our life's star,
Hath had elsewhere its setting
And cometh from afar."

Your man in bronze was an emigrant from the outland isles;—a messenger to your dim coast of earthland. He

was one of those who came with a truth, and lived its meaning. The revelation points to something better than the scheming of an age gone mad for gold and glory.

He was a mariner,—an admiral—of the upper blue, who brought you the bright gold of the Starry Indies.

And you killed him as you did the other Saviours!
But is there more to tell?

Yes. The end came at a crisis. Twelve days after Lee had surrendered, the fatal shot was fired. The lights of Ford's theatre went glimmering out for President Lincoln. But in their place,—as you make me think,—he must have seen the red of flushing dawn on eternal highlands;—the misty peaks above his native port.

The tragedy of his taking off had much to do with making us realize how great a man we had entertained unawares. The south lost its best friend;—the one it needed most in the reconstruction period.

And now, O voyager from the Pleiades:—the booming anger of the field guns at Gettysburg is hallowed in the vanished years. Long ago their ghostly echoes fainted down the Blue Ridge passes. The fabled rhythm from those stony harp strings is an echo we hear in our dreams. It shaped the towers of legended Troy and gave them to flames in war over a woman's beauty.

But the wizard chisels of Praxiteles and Michael Angelo never carved a man like Lincoln. God made him. You speak truly, he was a messenger of the immortals.

If the words of Pericles are wafted down to us from

the horizon of freedom, how far will the voice of Lincoln reach?

It will cadence on through the evolution of popular liberty. Far in the autumns of history its music will help to build the many mansions of republics yet to be,—the happy homes—with no fraternal blood stain on their lintels,—and as he said at Gettysburg, “Government of the people, by the people, and for the people, shall not perish from the earth.”

(The following was published in "*Detroit Every Saturday*," in the issue of Feb. 2nd, 1884.)

LONGFELLOW.

'Often I think of the beautiful town
 That is seated by the sea:
 Often in thought go up and down
 The pleasant streets of the dear old town,
 And my youth comes back to me,
 And a verse of a Lapland song
 Is singing, and saying still,
 'A boy's will is the wind's will,
 And the thoughts of youth are long, long thoughts.' "

—Longfellow's "*My Lost Youth*,"

The ships from ocean's olden mysteries
 At anchor swing amid the glancing seas;
 And winds from portal islands ruff the trees.

A poet's vanished youth once lingered there.
 His lyre was strung as if the native air
 With youth immortal touched his spirit rare.

No bugler he, the rallies wild to sound,
 That blow where legions ride the battle ground;
 Nor freedom's tunes to wing the world around.

Not his the throb of love's warm passion beat:
 Nor plaint of human wrong the murmur deep:
 But his the meadows ripe that scholars reap.

Sweet lie the fields that knew that reaper's hand.
 Where thoughtful autumns gild the harvest land,
 Like amber sheaves his fruitful pages stand.

I turn the leaves and feel like one who dreams;
 And sits beneath the lamp-light's penciled beams—
 While all the perfumed air with music teems.

The curtain rises: soft the foot-lights glow,
 And one by one with voices cadenced low,
 His bright creations come and sing and go.

We wonder what strange gladness dawned for him,
 When flushed with power those phantom forms to limn,
 From cloudy fancy peered their shadows dim.

By laughing tides a dusky chieftain walks;
And long for him the Indian Undine talks—
In murmuring tunes that Minnehaha mocks.

Primeval forests fringe the ocean's sheen;
And constant gaze through sad Acadie's scene
Thy wistful—lonely eyes, Evangeline.

Then blend the Tuscan keys of Dante's song —
The moaning music of the darker throng,—
With Saxon strains that now to us belong.

In rusted harness stalks a Norseman drear.
On rapid rhythmic hoofs rides Paul Revere.
The Wayside Inn sends forth a rouse of cheer.

And haunting still the old-time Plymouth shore,
Miles Standish walks his doughty rounds once more.
Demure Priscilla spins within the door.

I closed the book. A still entrancing spell
Of memory's music round me softly fell,
In which its Golden Legends seemed to dwell.

There thrilled the household words familiar grown;
And many a deep melodious bar alone,
A fragment floated,—from its lyric flown.

O Lute whose art our Western song refined,
Twas thine a pure idyllic charm to wind
Through all the gentler motions of the mind!

Where ruddy hearth-fires blaze by hanging cranes,
In evening groups around the ingle fanes,
Spring culture's graces from thy bright refrains.

To us the legends of the by-gone day,
Have climed like twining spray on castles gray,
Up lattice rythms of the artist's lay.

O sweet and serious song, whose mellow rhyme
Regales the night like bright Catawba wine;
There brims no future vintage of thy vine.

The voices of the night have ceased their swells,
And ebb like solemn tides of Bruges' bells.
The helmsman old, his ocean secret tells.*

At last O Mastersinger, unto thee;
Off mystic coasts the pilot gives the key
To wondrous hymns of some eternal sea.

The lay is hushed; the harp strings silent grow.
Again the bard his native land would know,
Beyond the hills where sinks the sunset glow.

His Curfew rings the gleam from dream-lit peaks.
O'er Alpine crags lies now the realm he seeks.
'Excelsior!' Tis youth immortal speaks!

His songs like prayers for which Sandalphon waits,
Make fragrant garlands round the starry gates,
From whence in youth the minstrel emigrates.

E. M. IRISH.

*Longfellow's, "The Secret of the Sea."

CHIDER.

(Spirit of Immortal Youth.)

After the German of Ruckert.

I passed where city gardens grew,
 (This tale the youth immortal told.)
 And asked when that old town was new,
 Of one who broke the mellow mould.
 He said:—and still he plied his spade:—
 “Who cares how old?
 These walls and towers were always made,
 To stand forever undecayed.”

Five hundred years their cycle wore;
 And by that place I passed once more.

No wall nor arbor left its clue,
 Where flocks went grazing down the dell
 His lonely reed a shepherd blew.
 I asked what year the city fell.
 He said:—and on the pipe he played
 Some herd-boy's spell:—
 “The grass grows here, the leafy shade;
 And in this mead my fleeces strayed.”

Five hundred years crept by once more.
 I sought the vales I knew before.

And lo! beside a brimming mere,
 A fisher blithly threw his net.
 I asked, “When came the billows here?
 He rested from his toiling wet,
 And laughing, down his meshes laid.
 (Gleamed full the net.)
 “Since winds its marge with wave-foam sprayed,
 Along this strand the fishers wade.”

Five hundred years passed by once more
 And I returned to walk that shore.

The space an olden forest held.
 A hermit in its clearing stood;
 And with his axe a tree he felled,
 I asked how old he thought the wood.

Quoth he:—"It is eternal shade
And solitude.
Forever live I in this glade.
The trees bloom here and never fade."

Five hundred years slid by once more.
I thought to roam that wold of yore;—

And heard men shout the market calls
Along a city's thronging pave.
I asked them when they built the walls:—
Where vanished forest, flocks and wave?
The people cried:—no heed they paid:—
Nor answer gave.
So change eternal here is made,
That omens far-off fates delayed

When ages flit like those before,
My feet shall trend that way once more.

E. M. IRISH.





